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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000100

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STATE FOR AF/PDPA, AF/W, INR/AA

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TAGS: OEXC PGOV PREL SCUL KPAO GV

SUBJECT: PAO CONAKRY MEETS WITH DIRECTOR OF MEDIA
REGULATORY AGENCY

REF: A. CONAKRY 0094

1B. CONAKRY 0162

Classified By: PAO ANDREW MCLEAN FOR REASON 1.4 B AND D

11. (U) Summary: The Public Affairs Officer (PAO) met with the new controversial director of the Commission National de la Communication (CNC), the government body that enforces press standards and guarantees press freedom in Guinea. The director talked about his vision for the CNC, his views of the media and press freedom, and the political orientation of the CNC. The PAO and director agreed to collaborate on an event for press freedom day, May 3. End summary.

12. (SBU) The PAO met with the director of the CNC Tibou Kamara April 8. President Conte appointed Kamara to the CNC on March 1. The decision sparked controversy because Kamara was actually suspended by the CNC in early January, during a period when there was no director. (Note: Kamara was highly critical of Prime Minister Kouyate in his newspaper, L'Observateur, and had also criticized Q CNC before his suspension. (reftel A)) Also he does not meet the legal age requirements for the position, bQ only 35 while the position requires a 40 year-old (reftel B). Some of the presQas been critical of Kamara's appointment because of the age issue as well as some of Kamara,s recent decisions, but others are taking a wait and see attitude.

13. (U) This was the PAO's first meeting with Kamara and the discussion focused on Kamara's priorities at CNC, his views on the state of the media in Guinea, and areas for collaboration between the CNC and the Embassy. Kamara was very concerned with the image of the CNC, which has deteriorated over the last year in the absence of a director. He wants to increase public awareness of CNC and its role as a media regulatory body, and restore its image as a defender of freedom of speech and the independent media, rather than an institution that disciplines the press in the interests of the government.

14. (U) Kamara said there are four challenges facing the Guinean media: the partisanship of the press, the difficulty of issuing standard press credentials, the weakness of the press subsidy, and the lack of professional training.

15. (U) The PAO reminded Kamara of the Embassy's interest in an independent media and of some of our past programs that have provided journalism training. The PAO reiterated that the Embassy would continue to look for ways to increase professionalism among journalists in Guinea. The PAO raised the possibility of creating an annual awards ceremony in Guinea to reward excellence in journalism. Kamara was enthusiastic about the proposal and said he would work with

the PAO to make that happen. Kamara reminded the PAO that May 3 is international press freedom day and said he was planning an event to commemorate the occasion. PAO offered the assistance of the Embassy in helping him organize that program. The Embassy press assistant has now been made a member of the organizing committee.

16. (SBU) The PAO raised the issue of the suspension of Kamara's newspaper, *L'Observateur*, by the CNC in January and whether it was awkward to now head the organization that suspended him. He said that the CNC was playing its role according to the letter of the law and it was normal for the CNC to call attention to any journalist who steps over the line. He said he wanted to encourage media professionals to engage in constructive dialogue with the government to ensure the peace and stability of Guinea.

17. (C) The PAO asked Kamara if the CNC was a partisan organization. He said that he will not be manipulated by partisan forces, and the fact that he comes from the private sector will help him with that. He intends to do his job professionally even if that causes frustration in some.

(Comment: As a newspaper editor Kamara was highly partisan, an outspoken critic of PM Kouyate and an apparent supporter of former PQCellou Dalein. End Comment.) Concerning his letter asking RTG to stop proclaiming both Mamadou Sylla and Youssouf Diallo as head of the Patronat, he said he was within his authority to ask the public broadcaster to stop confusing the public. As for his statements in support of Chantal Colle, he said he was speaking out in favor of free speech. He claims this is also within his purview as head of CNC since Colle's comments criticizing PM Kouyate were given at a press conference.

18. (C) COMMENT: In recent weeks Kamara wrote a letter to the
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Minister of Communication asking that RTG, the state-run broadcaster, clarify in its reporting who is the actual head of the Patronat, the business leaders association. The letter seemed to favor Mamadou Sylla, an ally of President Conte, over Youssouf Diallo. Kamara denied that he had any preference between the two. Also recently Kamara came out in support of Chantal Colle, another presidential ally, who was forced out of the country after she criticized Prime Minister Kouyate. Several independent newspaper editors, who are not necessarily friends of the President, also supported Colle on this issue.

19. (C) Kamara's recent statement on the Chantal Colle Affair and his letter regarding the Patronat are being widely interpreted as partisan politics. Kamara was appointed by the president in the middle of a politically charged period shortly after Conte had named another of his associates as the minister of communications. Both of these appointments have been viewed as a presidential attempt to restore control over information and the media. Whether or not Kamara will adhere to his professed commitment to non-partisanship remains to be seen. END COMMENT.

CARTER